

## THE FOUR QUADRUPEDS

### REFLECTIONS ON INDIAN ANIMAL PREFERENCE <sup>1</sup>

The art of India offers but few examples of a representative grouping of quadrupeds, displaying at the same time the expression of politico-religious ideas, their chronological-historical fixation and popular acceptance, which altogether could be interpreted as a symbol of Indian cultural convergence and unity. One such grouping occurs on a well known seal from Mohenjo Daro, depicting a horned deity surrounded by animals, dating from the Harappa period (pl. 1; henceforth referred to as « seal 420 »<sup>2</sup>). The other even more important example is the famous Sārnāth pillar capital, figuring below the crowning four lions a frieze of four quadrupeds, placed between spoked wheels around the abacus. This arrangement is closely paralleled by the same succession of animals on the older moonstones from Buddhist shrines at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka<sup>3</sup>. Our two Indian examples are attributed to the third millenium, respectively to the third century B.C. Close connections as well as marked differences should be noticed, as they reveal certain preferences of animal selections in the symbolical grouping of quadrupeds, which could be interpreted as characteristic of art traditions and cultural trends, referring to different aspects of popular and highart representations.

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1. A small book in my library, *Archaic and Ancient Indian Terracottas*, written by Dr. LUDWIK STERNBACH and published in Bombay, 1941, 40 years ago, has encouraged me to offer this short paper in his honour. To me this booklet has been a first inspiration to seriously consider Indian folkart.

2. This reference appears in a recent discussion of this seal by ALF HILTEBEITEL, *The Indus Valley "Proto-Siva" Reexamined Through Reflections on the Goddess, the Buffalo and the Symbolism of vāhanas*, in « Anthropos », 73, 1978, pp. 767-97. The seal bears the number 420 in volume 2 of E. J. H. MACKAY's, *Further Excavations at Mohenjo Daro*, New Delhi, 1937 (vol. 1, 1938).

3. For illustrations cp. VOLKER MOELLER, *Symbolik des Hinduismus und des Jainismus*, Tafelband, Stuttgart, 1974, Abb. 60; and H. MODE, *Die buddhistische Plastik auf Ceylon*, Leipzig, 1963, Abb. 34-40.

Let us first of all see, what kind of animals we meet with here. Fortunately all of them can safely be identified. « Seal 420 » depicts four quadrupeds: the elephant, the tiger, the buffalo and the rhinoceros, placed to the sides of the horned deity, three of them facing the central figure, the fourth, the elephant, turning its back as if marching away. Their sequence may or may not be of importance. It can be hardly established, as either the original engraving of the impression, either the horizontal or the vertical arrangement, could be taken as of primary importance.

We cannot exclude the central figure of « seal 420 », as it offers animal features, connected with one of the siding animals, the buffalo, as regards, the buffalo-horn headdress<sup>4</sup>. The horns are a dominating feature of the entire seal-composition, which may be called a heraldic design in regard to its symmetrical shape and to its symbolical character. There are other seals of the Harappa period with representational designs. We refer to the seal depicting a pipal tree represented by seven oneleaved branches. Originating from a central knob in the tree two unicorn heads with elongated necks branch off in such a way, that they side the tree like a huge pair of buffalo horns (pl. 2)<sup>5</sup>. If we compare the heraldic composition of this seal with that of « seal 420 », again the dominating position of this hornlike arrangement is meant to be of greatest significance. But apart of these two examples, there exist two faience amulets and a pottery plaque with rather strange heraldic designs, again closely connected with our « seal 420 » (fig. 1)<sup>6</sup>. This time the central figure seems to be a gharial heading in a vertical direction. The design is more crowded on the pottery plaque, but the main figures are repeated in all three instances. Two bulls with lowered heads combine their horns in a way to make them appear as a horned crown above the gharial snout. Below the bulls are other quadrupeds, the elephant and the tiger, on the left side, but only on the pottery plaque, a rhinoceros, as well as three humans interspersed between the animals. This time the horned crown is not as dominant, but it is topping the composition. Besides three of the animals of « seal 420 » reappear: elephant, tiger, rhinoceros. All pictures so far mentioned seem to prove that the horns, buffalo horns, but also smaller bull horns, are not necessarily meant to identify the central figure. Being connected with a human body, a tree and a crocodile type animal, the horns should be considered as a symbol (of divinity?) rather than as marking a particular figure.

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4. This deity is discussed and renamed by A. Hildebrandt (cp. note 2), but we cannot agree with all his conclusions, as we must doubt the relevance of later literary evidence in regard to this Harappa culture seal.

5. Cp. H. Mode, *Das frühe Indien*, Stuttgart, 1959, Tf. 67, above. I refer to my publication, Mode, 1959, for some further illustrations. The pipal-tree flanked by humans, cp. Mode, 1959, Abb. 28.

6. Illustrations: Mackay, 1937, pl. LXIX, 23; pl. XCI, 13, 19a; pl. XCII, 2a, 10; Mode, 1959, Tf. 72, above.

We should mention, that quite a number of horned human figures appear on other seals and plaques. We mention only two examples, with buffalo-resp. bull-horns<sup>7</sup>. In both cases two horned figures appear in similar scenes: a kneeling horned figure seems to worship a second horned figure standing within a pipal tree. The sex of the figures is not clearly indicated. Some of them, the pigtailed ones, may be female. The horns have a central elevation, sometimes looking like a pointed arrow-head, in other cases like a plume of feathers, or branchlike addition to the crown.

In the light of these observations, a rather daring comparison, though based on factual materials, could be made. We refer to the so-called copper-hoards, particular to a group of human like figures, sometimes identified as weapons (fig. 2)<sup>8</sup>. Suppose we dare to turn these « figures » upside down. There appears above a facelike rounding a couple of buffalo horns again with a central extension, this time similar to the split-tongued « antennae swords », another distinct feature of the copper hoard culture. We could not suppress this observation. If it is accepted, it may serve to solve some of the mysteries of the copper hoards and connect such archaeological finds from the Ganges region with the somewhat older materials of the Harappa civilisation. We should remind the reader, that animal-horn headdresses are still worn by Indian tribal people in ceremonial dances, to mention here only the so-called Bison-horn Marias<sup>9</sup>.

If the horned headdress connects our seals, the sequence of quadrupeds, so far recognised, permits us to add another 3 sided prism amulet (Harappa period) for further comparisons<sup>10</sup>. Two sides of the prism depict rows of animals, the upper one being the clearest to identify. The tiger with head turned back leads the procession and is followed by the rhinoceroses, the buffalo and the elephant. Above this row are some more animals, most prominent a gharial swallowing or holding a fish. The gharial connects the scene with the heraldic gharial-quadrupeds group. This subject matter, including two of the quadrupeds, is repeated on a cylinder seal found at Tell Asmar in Iraq (fig. 3)<sup>11</sup>. Elephant and rhinoceroses are figured in a typical Harappa style, showing that the Indian quadrupeds were known and recognised in Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C. In our opinion such widespread intercon-

7. Cp. Mode, 1959, Tf. 70, above and below. A very distinct horned figure is seen on a terracotta plaque from Kalibangan: S. R. RAO, *Lothal and the Indus Civilization*, Bombay, 1973, pl. XXXVI, C.

8. B. B. LAL, *Further Copper Hoards From the Gangetic Basin and a Review of the Problem*, in « Ancient India », 7, Jan. 1951, pp. 20-39, pl. V, VI, IX, Xa; Mode, 1959, Tf. 76.

9. Cp. VERRIER ELWIN, *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, Oxford, 1951, chapter VI, The Headdress, pp. 55-63.

10. J. MARSHALL (ed.), *Mohenjo Daro and the Indus Civilization*, vol. III, London, 1931, pl. XCVI, 14, pl. CXVIII, 10: A-C.

11. H. FRANKFORT, *Cylinder Seals*, London, 1939, text fig. 108.

limited remarks, chiefly applying to the grouping of four quadrupeds in

nections justify greater efforts of comparison and interpretation. In our heraldic or symbolic order, larger aspects must be neglected and we now return, after presenting important examples from the Harappan materials to our second main Indian object, the Sārnāth capital.

On the Sārnāth abacus four animals, elephant, lion, horse and humped bull are shown in a procession resembling the composition of the Mohenjo Daro prism (fig. 4). The elephant remains in the sequence, whereas all other animals have changed. The humped bull is a common subjects on other Harappan seals, but to our knowledge neither horse nor lion can be found on Harappan materials. It may be suggested however, that in Sārnāth the tiger has been replaced by the lion, the latter animal being taken over in the Maurya period as representative of royal power in the Near East, very prominent in the Achaemenid empire bordering the northwestern Indian frontiers up to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. That the humped bull should have taken the place of the buffalo does not seem as certain. There is some evidence, that rather the bull with lowered neck, or the short-horned bull, was more closely associated with the buffalo in the Harappa period. Two horns in profile were added to form a broader buffalo-like pair of horns, as we have already seen. On a very interesting seal from Chanhudaro, until then explained as a bull wildly attacking a human being, I have seen the sexual approach of a bull towards a woman<sup>12</sup>. My suggestion went to compare this with the later ritual practise of the *asvamedha* part of which had been the cohabitation of the selected horse with the royal spouse. In this particular case the horse may have replaced the bull. It seems more likely to me that the horse replaced the buffalo (or bull) of the Harappa period, as the only remaining animal to be replaced would be the rhinoceroses. I cannot discover any connection between the horse and the rhinoceroses. The latter animal seems to have vanished almost completely from later Indian art representation. The humped bull however may have its place as a representative animal.

To repeat our suggestions regarding the replacement of the older row of four quadrupeds by the new set in the Maurya period, the lion should be accepted for the tiger, the horse for the buffalo, the humped bull for the rhinoceroses, whereas the elephant alone remains unchanged. We might interpret all these changes on the basis, that the old Indian animals of local origin and significance were accepted in the Harappa period, whereas a new set of representative animals, particularly lion and horse, have been taken over from ancient Near Eastern practises to symbolize royal power. The Maurya dynasty, unifying large territories of the Indian subcontinent, thus utilised for the purpose of royal and

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12. Cp. Mode, 1959, pp. 59-72, pl. 66, above; comparative materials text figs. 39-45.

politico-religious representation an animal symbolism of mixed origin, claiming sovereignty on local tradition and universal continuity alike<sup>13</sup>.

The animal symbolism of our « seal 420 » and the Sārṇāth capital seems to be separated by more or less 2000 years. There exist materials to bridge this gap. A group of fairly largesized bronze animal figures has been discovered by chance digging at Daimabad in Mahārāshtra (pl. 3)<sup>14</sup>. A manned chariot, drawn by two humped bulls, can be set aside for our purpose. But the other three animals, all placed on wheeled platforms, are: the elephant, the rhinoceros and the buffalo. The tiger is missing and we cannot be certain if this animal was omitted, or if this particular figure has just not been found. The parallel to our « seal 420 » is striking enough. The date suggested for the origin of these heavy bronzes (the elephant is 18 cm high and has a weight of 29 kg) has been based on stratified Daimabad materials roughly as 1300 B.C. (or somewhat earlier!). Looking at the buffalo head and horns in M. K. Dhawelikar's photograph, once again the similarity with the « anthropomorphic » objects of the copper hoard culture, dating to the second millenium B.C. and thus roughly contemporary, will be immediately noticed. Let us remember the fact that Daimabad is situated much to the south. Much further to the south, in the Nilgiri mountains, a tribal community is known, the Todas, worshipping the buffalo as a sacred animal. Tracing back the older set of quadrupeds to periods older than the Harappan civilization, there is rich evidence from rock paintings on the inner surfaces of rock shelters in Madhya Pradesh, some of them not so far to the east of Daimabad<sup>15</sup>. The dating of Indian rock painting is much debated, but recently a certain consensus of opinion has been reached regarding a relative chronological order within the limits of roughly fixed absolute dates. Such conclusions permit us to recognise individual representations of all the four quadrupeds of the Mohenjo Daro « seal 420 » in earliest Indian rock painting, possibly end-palaeolithic (roughly 10000-8000 B.C.; fig. 5)<sup>16</sup>. The buffalo in rock painting repeatedly resembles the bull with lowered head, thus adding to the possible identification of these animals as suggested above. The horned human figure appears as frequently in early rock paintings as on the Harappa materials<sup>17</sup>. Even if the earliest dates are not accepted, the evidence of the Harappa

13. Some remarks regarding tigers and lions cp. H. MODE, *Tiger and Lion Cultures Reflected in Archaeology and Folklore*, in « Folklore » (Calcutta), 4, 1963, 289-96.

14. The Daimabad bronzes have been published and discussed by M. K. DHAWELIKAR, *Proto Paśupati in Western India*, in « East and West », NS, 28, 1978, pp. 203-11. An older publication: « Dawn of Civilization in Maharashtra », Bombay, 1975.

15. For a rich selection of Indian rock paintings refer to: V. S. WAKANKAR, R. R. R. BROOKS, *Stone Age Painting in India*, Bombay, 1976; and L. WANKE, *Zentralindische Felsbilder*, Graz, 1977.

16. Wakankar/Brooks, 1976, p. 96, Style 1, 2; p. 64 (Raisen). Wanke, 1977, p. 78, Abb. 61.

17. Wakankar/Brooks, 1976, p. 32, Bhimbetka-Kalibangan.

period is definitely strengthened by the multitude of rock painting, as representing Indian art of Middle India in the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> millenium B.C.

We may finally look around for significant comparisons of animal preferences in Indian art of later ages. The so-called punch marked coins of the later half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millenium B.C. depict various animals as symbols. The elephant is most prominent, horse and humped bull have reached the Maurya period prominence, whereas buffalo and rhinoceros have disappeared. The position of the lion on these coins is established, although the tiger is not completely missing<sup>18</sup>. As we have repeatedly referred to later tribal evidence, we may not ignore the evidence of tatooing marks, placing the elephant, the tiger and the horse in a prominent position. Tribal art in general confirms this observations. Quadrupeds chiefly depicted are the elephant, the tiger, the humped bull and the horse (figs. 6, 7)<sup>19</sup>.

The Sārnāth set of quadrupeds, although never again united in a group, remains to supply the preferred animals of the classical periods of Indian art, all of them connected with the chief deities of the Indian pantheon. We remember the elephant as carrying Indra; the humped bull, Nandi, of Śiva; the lion as vehicle of his spouse, Dūrgā; and the horse less prominent, signifying the last incarnation of Viṣṇu. Besides the elephant, there are two more quadrupeds of the old set of « seal 420 » indicating their presence, serving gods of the Hindu pantheon. The tigerskin is worn by Śiva, or used by him as a seat. The buffalo appears in a somewhat deplacéd position, as the great Asura, the buffalo demon defeated by Dūrgā. Yama, the god of the dead, rides on the buffalo<sup>20</sup>.

The heraldic grouping or sequence of the four quadrupeds has to be considered as typical for the Harappa culture and as exceptional for classical Indian art. There exists another possibility of symbolic representation, already mentioned, combining features of the individual animals to form a new artificial being, what in German language is called « Mischwesen ». Such devices have an old tradition in the Harappa period, but are well known in later classical Indian art as well. Some of the gods of the Hindu pantheon bear animal features, most prominent Ganeṣa, the elephant-headed son of Śiva, but also Viṣṇu in several of his incarnations, as varāha, boar-headed, or narasinha, man-

18. Some illustrations cp. J. N. BANERJEE, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1956, pl. I-II. Further materials: K. K. DASGUPTA, *A Tribal History of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1974, plates.

19. V. Elwin, 1951, figs. 118 (tiger), 176-180 (elephants), 210 (humped bulls), 212 (horses).

20. The position of the buffalo in classical Indian religion is exhaustively discussed by Hiltebeitel, 1978, who claims him to be the central figure of « seal 420 », the Proto-Mahiṣa, replacing the Proto-Śiva. Yama, being the Lokapāla of the South, leads Hiltebeitel to interpret the other quadrupeds as indicating the main directions of the compass. The Sārnāth capital confirms such interpretations, even more the moonstone-sequences from Anuradhapura, cp. note 3.



lion. Not distinguished as gods, but very popular in later Indian art are the makara, a crocodile- or elephant-headed monster and the gajasinha, the elephant-lion Mischwesen.

Harappan art depicts horned tigers, threeheaded animals, bullmen and tigerwomen, and, most distinct of all a bull-horned tiger-elephant and a bull- or buffalo-horned gharial (fig. 8)<sup>21</sup>. These last named combinations could well be compared to the gajasinha and the makara respectively<sup>22</sup>.

The elephant-headed tiger remains along with the elephant-headed lion a subject of later Indian art. It is noteworthy that the tiger-elephant combination should be preferred in popular art (pl. 4), playing cards, astrological drawings or the like. In just the same way the tiger as an individual animal remains to be, along with the elephant, the most popular beast of the Indian jungle in folklore and folkart. In popular feeling the tiger was never ousted by the lion. The latter animal, where-ever it appears in classical literature or art, derives its dominant position from non-Indian origins and never fully conquered the imagination of the people. Even the goddess Dūrgā, if depicted in folkart, more frequently rides the tiger and not the lion. As one of many possible examples, we may see on a folk miniature from Saurashtra, Budha, the planet Mercury, figured as riding on a tiger (pl. 5).

The makara, known in Indian art from earliest Buddhist sculptures, remained a much favoured mythological, sometimes merely decorative, motif throughout all periods of classical art development (pl. 6). But its origin, though much discussed, has not been explained beyond doubt<sup>23</sup>. Many changes of the type occur, but the crocodile associations of the makara, as a mainly aquatic animal range most prominent and are sometimes ascertained by the addition of a fishtail. Not rare, however, are elephant features, particularly designating the head or parts of it and the frontal pair of feet. Occasionally one may even discover hornlike prolongations of makara heads and, most surprising

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21. Cp. H. MODE, *Indische Frühkulturen und ihre Beziehungen zum Westen*, Basel, 1944, fig. 92 (elephant-tiger), fig. 138 (threeheaded bull), fig. 147 (tiger-woman). An elephant-headed bull on a Jemdet Nasr seal cp. Mode, 1944, fig. 128, and as a miniature stone sculpture from Mohenjo Daro, fig. 129. For « Mischwesen » in general cp. H. MODE, *Fabulous Beasts and Demons*, London, 1975, elephant-headed figures on p. 143.

22. Gajasinha and makara on a Vellur sculpture cp. C. SIVARAMAMURTI, *Indien. Kunst und Kultur*, Freiburg, 1975, pl. 162.

23. Besides the classical publication of A.K. COOMARASWAMY, *Yakṣas*, Pt. II, Washington, 1931, chapter 4, we only mention a series of articles on the makara, profoundly illustrated, published in « Arts Asiatiques », I, fasc. 3, 1954, pp. 189-207; V, fasc. 3, 1958, pp. 183-206; V, fasc. 4, 1958, pp. 272-92, by O. VIENNOT.

of all, the typical upstanding leaf-like ears of the Harappa period rhinoceros figures on seals and amulets<sup>24</sup>.

To conclude our short remarks we would name the elephant and the tiger as representing the animals of highest station, truly reflecting Indian popular feeling within a time distance of roughly ten thousand years. These two giants of the Indian jungle have survived physically, as well as in art representations, have pushed aside their ancient contemporaries the rhinoceros (almost completely) and the buffalo (most efficiently), have remained superior to foreign intruders like the horse and the lion, and have even kept the humped bull, of Harappan and of classical reputation, within the limits of a later and lesser popularity.

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24. Cp. Viennot, 1954, pl. I, 3, elephant-head and crocodile-snout and elephant-forelegs; Viennot, 1954, pl. II, 6, tiger paws?; Viennot, 1954, pl. I, 6, pl. VII, 6-8, and Viennot, 1958 (fasc. 3), fig. 3, all hornlike extensions; Viennot, 1958 (fasc. 3), figs. 19, 20, rhinoceros ears!





Plate 1: Mohenjo Daro « Seal 420 ». Photo from Casting.



Plate 2: Mohenjo Daro. Seal. Pipal tree and unicorn heads.

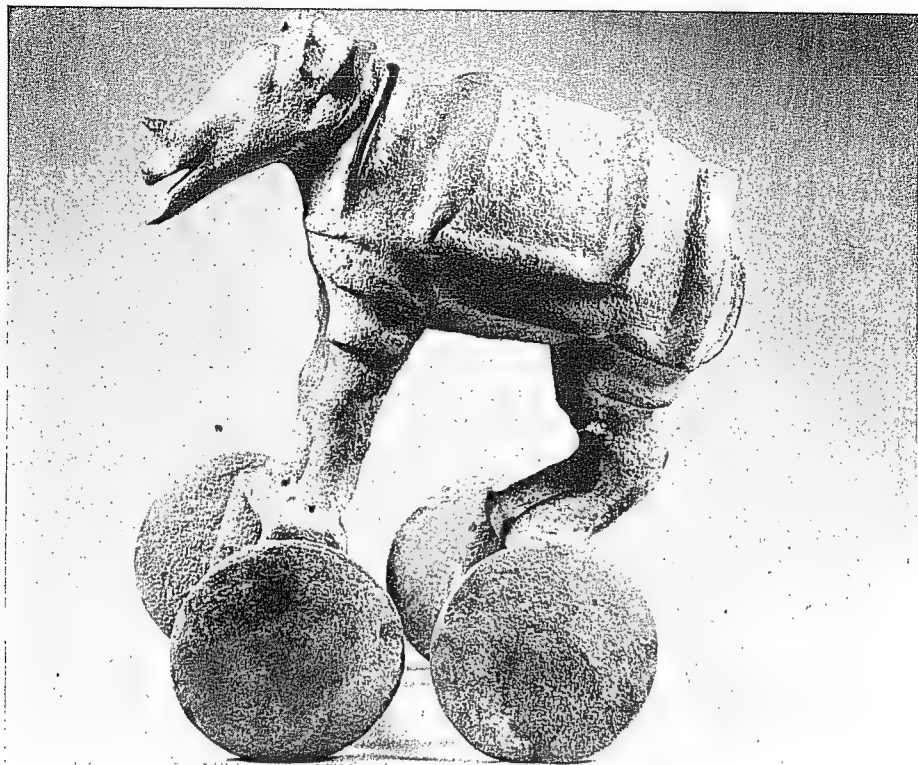


Plate 3: Daimabad. Bronze. Rhinoceros. Photo ASI.



Plate 4: Baroda Museum. Playing Card. 18<sup>th</sup> century. Deccan.

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Plate 5: Saurashtra. Budha (Mercury). Coll. Khodidas Parmar, Bhavnagar.  
Photo: Subodh Chandra, Bombay.



Plate 6: Sanchi Stupa I. Balustrade from A.A. V, 1955, p. 275, fig. 30

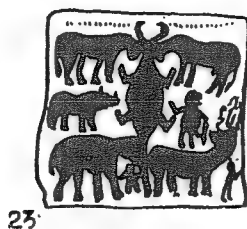


Fig. 1: Mohenjo Daro. Design of Pottery Plaque.

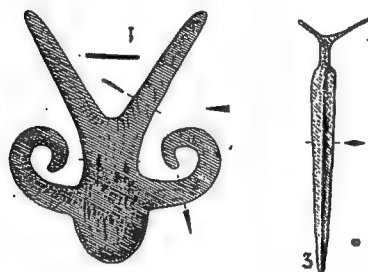


Fig. 2: « Copper hoards », a) Sheorajpūr, b) Fatehgarh from « Ancient India », no. 9, fig. 5.

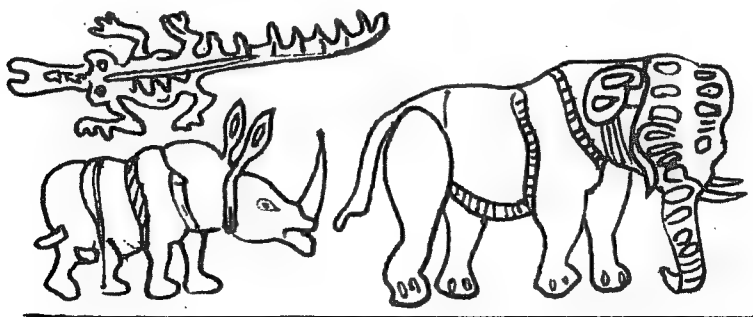


Fig. 3: Tell Asmar. Cylinder Seal from H. Frankfort, 1939, text fig. 108.



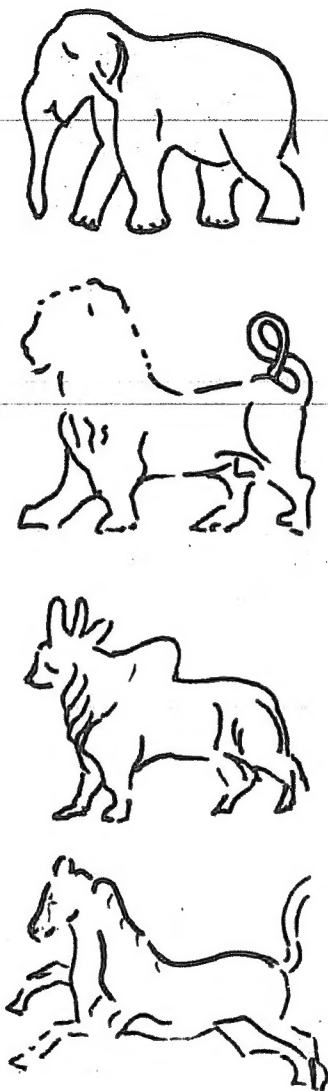


Fig. 4: Designs of animals from Sarnath Capital.

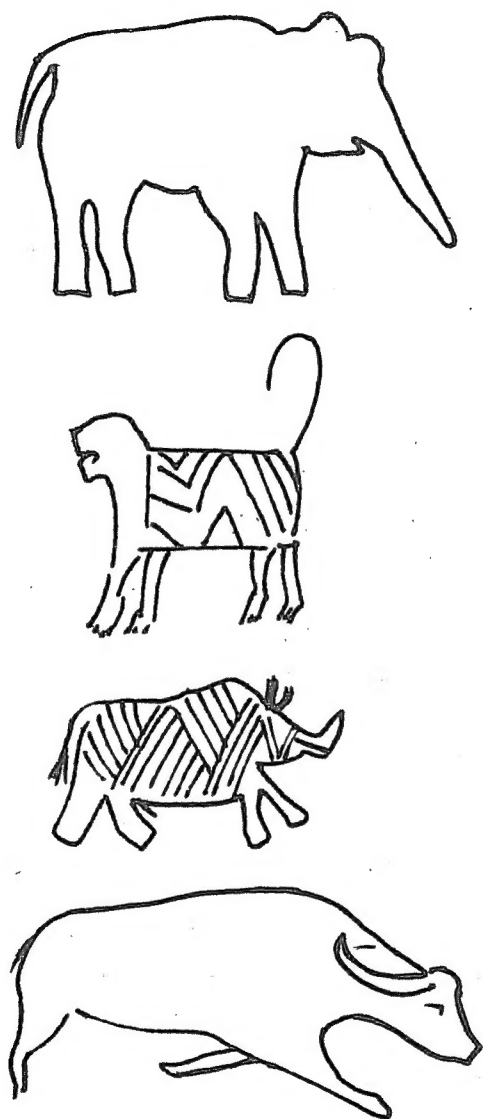
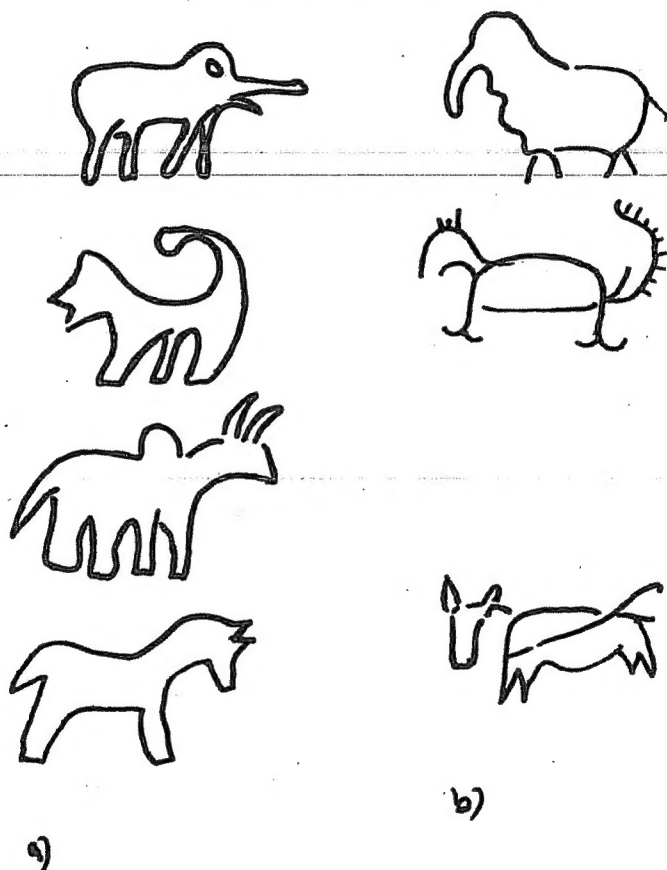


Fig. 5: Designs from rock paintings, Madhya Pradesh.



Figs. 6, 7: Designs from Punchmarked Coins. Designs from Tatooing.



Fig. 8: Mohenjo Daro. Seal design: Elephant-Tiger.